

- The Auk. (Vol. xxxii. No. 2. Cambridge, Mass., 1915.)
Avicultural Magazine. (Third Series, Vol. vi. Nos. 6-8. London, 1915.)
Bird Notes. (New Series, Vol. vi. Nos. 4-6. Ashbourne, 1915.)
British Birds. (Vol. viii. Nos. 11-12. London, 1915.)
California Fish and Game. (Vol. i. No. 3. San Francisco, 1915.)
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The Emu. (Vol. xiv. pt. 4. Melbourne, 1915.)
The Irish Naturalist. (Vol. xxiv. Nos. 4-6. Dublin, 1915.)
Journal of the Federated Malay States Museums. (Vols. v. No. 3; vi. No. 1. Kuala Lumpur, 1915.)
Messenger Ornithologique. (1915, No. 2. Moscow, 1915.)
Report of the Poultry Expert (South Australia) for the Year 1913-14. (Adelaide, 1915.)
The Scottish Naturalist. (Nos. 40-42. Edinburgh, 1915.)
The South Australian Ornithologist. (Vol. ii. pt. 2. Adelaide, 1915.)
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XXXI.—*Letters, Extracts, and Notes.*

THE following letters have been received :—

MESSRS. COCKERELL AND THORPE.

SIR,—My attention has been called to a paper by Mr. G. M. Mathews, "A recent Ornithological Discovery in Australia," published in 'The Ibis' for January 1915. On p. 80 Mr. Mathews, in recording the names of the collectors who "have touched at Cape York," mentions those of Messrs. Cockerell and Thorpe. He says:—"These collectors, who must stand in the forefront of careful and accurate workers as regards the acquisition and preparation of bird-skins, thought that by the falsification of localities they might obtain better prices for their goods; they therefore made an expedition to some islands to the north of Australia, probably the Aru group, where they made a magnificent collection, and then palmed these off mixed with true Cape York birds as having been all procured at Cape York. This collection, purchased by Messrs. Godman and Salvin, and later presented to the British Museum, has

been a source of endless trouble, and the only scientific course would have been to have rejected it entirely."

With Mr. Cockerell I have nothing to do, I knew him not, but of Mr. J. A. Thorpe, late taxidermist to this Museum, I necessarily knew a good deal; he was not only a true and faithful servant of the Trustees for thirty-eight years, but, so far as his history is known to a very wide circle of friends here, was never at or near the Aru Islands. As a matter of fact, Mr. Thorpe's collecting was, at the period in question, confined to the Cape York Peninsula. In the second place, a large portion of his collection was purchased by the Australian Museum Trustees of the day, through the then Curator, Mr. Gerard Krefft, and the skins forming this collection are still in evidence here.

Now, in Mr. Mathews's remarks there is, to put it mildly, a distinct libel on the memory of a dead man, who, I know, from my association with him, would have been the last to perpetrate, or assist in perpetrating, what would have been nothing more or less than a common swindle.

It is not to be supposed for a moment that a keen naturalist, like Mr. Krefft, would have neglected the opportunity of acquiring, for his Trustees, such valuable material, at that time, as bird-skins from the Aru Islands. As a matter of fact, all the skins purchased from Mr. Thorpe on his return from Cape York, and before he became officially connected with this Institution, are true local species.

For the honour of my late friend, and the good name of the Australian Museum, I cannot allow Mr. Mathews's statement to go forth without uttering this protest.

I am, Sir,

Yours faithfully,

R. ETHERIDGE, JUD.

The Australian Museum,
Sydney.
March 16, 1915.

THE BLACK-THROATED AND BLACK-EARED WHEATEARS.

SIR,—In the Bulletin of the B. O. C. for the March meeting, p. 89, I notice that Dr. Hartert invites a discussion on the question of the specific distinctness of the Black-throated and Black-eared Wheatear, giving five main reasons why they should be considered as one species having a dimorphic phase in the males. The facts as he states them are obviously correct, and hence, presuming there is no further evidence at hand, the subject becomes merely one of opinion. The main question of importance in this case seems to me to be not so much whether they are or are not the same species, but how a certain group of birds showing in the males very obvious and well-marked differences, may be most conveniently distinguished. The chief object of all systematic work should be to so arrange and name the various varieties and forms of animal life that they may be conveniently classified and recognised without having recourse to long and verbose descriptions. To consider these two forms as one species is therefore simply to prove a very plain and obvious fact, so that if I was only to find Black-throated males in one locality, I should not be able to convey the fact without going into a description. That being so, it becomes necessary to consider by what accepted means of classification they can be named. They cannot be designated by simple trinomials as (save in very exceptional cases) a trinomial implies a geographical variety, and two geographical varieties cannot have the same breeding area. If they are considered as the same species, we have to fall back on the cumbersome quadrinomial, viz., *Enanthe h. hispanica* var., which is the only logical solution if they are considered as the same species; if, however, we consider them as two different species, all difficulties disappear.

Is there any absolute proof that they are one species? Before we can answer that, we must, I think, try and define a species. We all know, or think we know, what a species is, but I have met nobody yet who could give an accurate

definition which would cover all cases, and that for the very simple reason that "species" is merely a very convenient term founded by systematists to enable us to arrange and classify animal and plant life, but it is not a natural division. Some forms are so far differentiated that it is easy to call them different species; others are in process of differentiation, and to recognise these we fall back on the term "subspecies." Others, again, as in the case of these Wheatears, are perhaps evolving by what is known as discontinuous variation, and our system has no recognised means of dealing with it.

If we go down to derivations we find that the word "species" in the zoological sense is probably cognate to the old word, which referred to "money paid by the tale," and we read in Skeat that this was "probably by confusion with the Latin ablative specie, as if paid in specie = equals paid in *visible* coin." (The *italics* are mine.) We have therefore considerable evidence to show that "species" referred to forms that were *visibly* different, as for example in the case of these two Wheatears.

Dr. Hartert has not given us any instance of these two forms interbreeding, and I doubt if any evidence exists as yet, for it would be necessary to take the young alive from various nests of which the parents were known and see if both forms of male were found in the same nest and the proportions of each form; when this has been done we shall be in a better position to understand the true meanings of these forms, and a steady advance in our knowledge will have been made. Till then there may be much to be said on both sides, but nothing that can prevent it remaining a matter of convenience and opinion.

I am, Sir,

Yours faithfully,

J. LEWIS BONHOTE.

Government Zoological Gardens, Giza,

Nr. Cairo, Egypt.

May 27, 1915.

Conserve the Collector.—Mr. Joseph Grinnell, of the California Museum of Vertebrate Zoology at Berkeley, California, has sent us a copy of an article recently contributed by him to 'Science' (vol. xli. pp. 229-232) under the above title. He states that in America the type of field observer who depends solely on long range identification is becoming more and more prevalent, but that the opera-glass student even if experienced cannot be depended upon to take the place of the collector. Accuracy of identification of species and especially of subspecies rests for final appeal upon the actual capture and comparison of specimens. Ornithology as a science is threatened, and it should not be allowed to lapse wholly into the status of a recreation or a hobby to be indulged in only in a superficial way by amateurs or dilettantes.

The movement against collecting and collectors and the restrictions in regard to obtaining permits for collecting for scientific purposes have perhaps become more acute in the United States than they have in England. Here game-laws and the possession of large tracts of land by single owners have prevented the great destruction of bird-life, and especially of game-birds, which has taken place to so great an extent of late years in America. Still one notices a strong tendency in the same direction in England. There can be no doubt that observation with glasses and camera-work must be combined with collecting and skinning to form a good field ornithologist, and we would strongly endorse Mr. Grinnell's plea for the "conservation of the collector."

Notice to Members.—It is proposed to publish a list of all the Members of the Union who have been or are serving in any branch of His Majesty's Forces during the present war.

The Editor will be much obliged if Members will forward their names, as well as those of any of their friends who are Members, with details of rank and regiment or ship and where serving, to him at 10 Sloane Court, London, S.W. It is hoped to print a preliminary list, at any rate, in the October number of 'The Ibis.'

Notice to Members.—Many Members of the Union have not yet returned the new Banker's Order Form for the increased subscription which was recently circulated, and the Secretary will be much obliged if they will kindly do so at their earliest convenience, as the work of registering and forwarding the forms to their respective banks is being greatly delayed.